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Domesticity Affected by Corruption in Society

Throughout this course, the theme of domesticity had been presented in many different ways. Not only were these themes important to the specific time periods in which the authors were writing, but they are also relevant to domestic themes and issues of today’s world. This is why I chose to do my project on the “corrupted society” of Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth.* In Wharton’s novel, the idea that partying, social status, beauty, materialism and wealth are what bring domestic success is evident through the thoughts and actions of the characters. I wanted to portray this and show the class that these aspects of life did not bring the characters life-long satisfaction, and how this can relate to life today.

Primarily, I chose to do my project on *The House of Mirth*’s theme of corrupted society because I felt that it most relates to my life and associates with important issues. When discussing the readings for class throughout the semester, certain discussions were more interesting to me than others; this is one that stood out to me the most. *The House of Mirth* is my favorite text that we had read this semester due to the issues Wharton brought up over social status, money, materialism, and popularity. These issues are very important to all kinds of people because they can somehow be related to everyone’s lives. To visually present this theme, I used a board that was half of a bulletin board and half of a dry-erase board so that I could use my creativity in the simplest way. By using the board, I was able to draw random things I felt are relevant to the chosen theme, as well as being creative with different fonts and writing, which I love to do. Also, I could get creative with simple flash cards to easily show present quotes I wanted to touch on.

The quotes I used from the novel and from Lana Del Rey’s songs tied in nicely with the format I used and allowed me to transition smoothly from subject to subject. Along with the quotes and words, I also drew a girl who looked sad. This girl symbolizes anyone who feels emptiness due to the role that materialism, money, popularity and social status play in his or her life. More specifically, the girl can represent Lily Bart, because Lily was a victim of society and by the end of her life she had experienced various moments of depression and sadness. I like how the board being half dry-erase and half bulletin bard allowed me to be creative and use different means of a clear presentation of my theme, making it more interesting to create and present.

Though my visual presentation was very simple, the message I was trying to convey is much heavier. As stated before, the social corruption in *The House of Mirth* brings up various subjects that are still very important in today’s society. I am very interested by social issues and differing views on “social norms,” and today things involving partying, sex, social status, money, materialism and more teeter on the line between being social problems and social norms. I like that Wharton uses the example of a broken young woman who’s dream is to marry a rich man and achieve high social status. With the presentation of Lily and her friends, Wharton’s audience can see the negative effects of obsession of wealth, popularity and beauty can have on people.

I also wanted to focus on the effects these themes have on domesticity. One example my project contained is the quote in which it is evident that Bertha is only using Lily, a beautiful woman who is desperate for attention and social satisfaction, so that she can get away with cheating on her husband. Bertha and George’s marital problems remind me of what I see with couples today; there is much distrust and disloyalty, and wealthy people can “afford” to have these relationships. We have seen celebrities, such as Jude Law, cheat on their wives or husbands with their nannies. People of wealth and status might be able to get away with wrongdoings easier than others can because they can buy their way through corruption. This relates to the example of Lana del Rey’s song “National Anthem” that I presented; she sings about money, partying and beauty being the “anthem of success,” which is also directly relates to *The House of Mirth*.

Domesticity is that which pertains to life at home. My project contains a few examples of how money, materialism, partying and being dishonest can affect people’s domestic lives. The household is known to be a place of trust and security, which it is many times far from being. Wharton’s uses typical social topics to portray the problems that can arise in one’s life with characters like Lily and Bertha in *The House of Mirth*. Although wealth is not always correlated with unfavorable behavior, I wanted to use Wharton’s novel to convey the message that trust and happiness should be invested carefully and not be motivated by money, social status, or materialism.